Applicant : Catherine Tornabene et al.   Attorney's Docket No.: 06975-114001 / Community 05
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REMARKS

Claims 1-55 are pending, with claims 1, 24, 34, and 35 being independent.

Claims 1-10, 14-44, 54 and 55 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Sonnenreich (U.S. 5,974,446).

Claims 11-13 which depend from independent claim 1, stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sonnenreich.

Claims 45-53 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sonnenreich in view of Simonoff. (U.S. 5,974,446).

This response first addresses the rejection with respect to claims 1-10, 14-23, 35-44, 54, and 55. Second, this response addresses claims 24-33 and claim 34. Finally, this response addresses claims 11-13 and claims 45-53.

Claim 1-10, 14-23, 35-44, 54, and 55

With respect to independent claims 1 and 35 and their respective dependent claims, Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

Claim 1 recites a computer-implemented method of sharing information among members of a group that includes storing information about more than one current member of a group in a database and receiving instructions from at least one current member to invite at least one prospective member to join the group. Responsive to these instructions, an invitation is sent to the prospective member to join the group and a response is received from the prospective member. Based upon receipt of an affirmative response, the prospective member is added to the group as a new member and services to current members are automatically updated to account for the new member.

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection because Sonnenreich fails to describe or suggest sending an invitation to a prospective member to join the group and adding the prospective member to the group as a new member based upon receipt of an affirmative response to the invitation. By contrast, Sonnenreich describes an online classroom environment that enables classroom members to communicate with one another and

with the instructor. The members also can communicate with persons outside of the online classroom. However, nowhere does Sonnenreich describe or suggest sending an invitation to add a prospective member to the group and adding a new member based on an affirmative response from the prospective member.

The office action attempts to support the rejection by relying upon the following sections of Sonnenreich, which merely describe communication schemes between the classroom members.

> All groups have this feature. Any members that are currently viewing a group's window may participate in its chat session.
> There is also provided a list down the side of the group window which contains the name of each member of the group currently online. The list will be sorted such that professors and TA's are at the top, followed by the people the user knows. By clicking on a user's name one can send either an email message or a real-time zephyr message to that user. Email messages are useful for sending long or complex messages that may incorporate graphics, sound, or files from other software packages. These messages can be sent to individual users either online or off-line, entire groups, or even to people on the Internet that are not part of the system.
>
> Like email messages, however, they can be sent to users or entire groups. But, zephyrs immediately appear in a separate window on the designated user's screen and only function if the selected user is on-line. Zephyrs are preferable to email for quick, real-time messages, and also preferable to chat since it does not require viewing a specific window in order to communicate. It is possible to block receiving zephyrs from a particular user or zephyrs sent to an entire group. Groups may contain multimedia presentations that any member can download at any time.

The above-quoted section, which is found at col. 4, lines 15-30 and 35-44 of Sonnenreich, describes sending messages to people on the Internet who are not a part of a system, but it does not suggest sending an invitation to people on the Internet to join the system or adding a person to the group based upon their response to such an invitation to join. Thus, Sonnenreich describes sending messages to people on the Internet that are not part of the system, but Sonnenreich does not describe or suggest any method or mechanism to send an invitation to a person to join the group and to add the person to the group upon receipt of an affirmative response, as recited in claim 1.

Like claim 1, independent claim 35 recites a computer program, stored on a computer readable medium, includes instructions for sending an invitation to the prospective member to join the group and receiving a response from the prospective member. Also like claim 1, the prospective member is added to the group as a new member based upon receipt of an affirmative response.

For at least these reasons, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of independent claims 1 and 35 and their respective dependent claims, namely claims 2-10, 14-23, 36-44, 54 and 55.

Claims 24-33

With respect to independent claim 24, Applicants have amended this claim to obviate the rejection.

As amended, claim 24 recites a communication system for sharing information among members of a group that includes a group administrator for processing information about the current members of the group; a group communicator cooperating with the group administrator for delivering and exchanging information with current and prospective group members and a group information updater cooperating with the group communicator and group administrator for providing automatically updated services to current members including a new member, wherein in response to an affirmative response to an invitation to a prospective member to join the group, the group communicator notifies the group information updater to add the prospective member to the group.

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection because Sonnenreich fails to describe or suggest instructing the group information updater to add the prospective member to the group in response to an affirmative response to an invitation to a prospective member to join the group. In fact, as discussed above with respect to claims 1 and 35, Sonnenreich does not describe or suggest adding a prospective member to the group in response to an affirmative response from the prospective member.

For at least these reasons, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of amended independent claim 24 and its respective dependent claims.

Claim 34

With respect to independent claim 34, Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

Claim 34 recites a graphical user interface for inviting a prospective member of a group to join the group. The graphical user interface includes an invitation for the prospective member to join the group, a name of the group, a list of one or more current members of the group, and a tool for the prospective member to respond to the invitation. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection because Sonnenreich fails to describe or suggest providing a graphical user interface to a prospective member that includes a name of a group, a list of the members of the group, and a tool for the prospective member to join the group prior to being a current member of the group.

Sonnenreich describes a user interface for an online learning environment that enables any current members to see the group name and group member list. The relied-upon section of Sonnenreich, at col. 4, lines 49-67 and FIG. 3B, merely describes the toolbar displayed to current members of the system that enables the current member to view a list of the people they know on the system:

> The key to the novel software is the concept of a group. A group is collections of people with common interests. When a user logs into the system, he or she will see a toolbar containing a button for each group they belong to. All users are members of their own private "group" which contains a list of the people they know on the system. Classes, fields of interest and hobbies are also represented as groups. Clicking on any one of the group buttons will bring up a new window. This contains all of the actions that can be performed with the group. Each group has an information page which acts as the reference point for the group's archived resources such as presentations, discussions, frequently asked questions (FAQ's) and software.
>
> Groups that represent classes will have additional features such as online test and homework assignments, multimedia lectures and lecture notes. The lectures, homework assignments and tests may be viewed at a student's convenience.

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Consistent with this section, Sonnenreich does not describe or suggest any user interface for a member who is not part of the system (i.e., a prospective member) that includes an invitation to join the group, a name of the group and a list of one or more current members of the group.

Furthermore, Sonnenreich fails to describe or suggest a tool for a prospective member to join a group. Instead, the Office Action merely points to Sonnenreich's description of members being able to send messages to people on the Internet for support of this feature.

For at least these reasons, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claim 34.

Claims 11-13

With respect to claims 11-13, applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection because Sonnenreich fail to describe or suggest the features discussed above with respect to independent claim 1 upon which claims 11-13 depend. As noted above, Sonnenreich fails to describe or suggest sending an invitation to a prospective member to join the group and adding the prospective member to the group as a new member based upon receipt of an affirmative response, as recited in claim 1.

For at least these reasons, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the rejection § 103(a) of claims 11, 12 and 13.

Claims 45-53

With respect to claims 45-53, applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection because Sonnenreich and Simonoff, either alone or in combination, fail to describe or suggest the features discussed above with respect to independent claim 1 upon which claims 45-53 depend. As noted above, Sonnenreich fails to describe or suggest sending an invitation to a prospective member to join the group and adding the prospective member to the group as a new member based upon receipt of an affirmative response, as recited in claim 1.

Simonoff fails to remedy the Sonnenreich shortcomings and, notably, is not relied upon in the Office Action to support the rejection of these features.

For at least these reasons, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the § 103(a) rejection of claims 45-53.

No fees are believed to be due. However, during prosecution of this application, please apply any deficiencies or credits to deposit account 06-1050.

Respectfully submitted,

Date:___11/15/2001_____
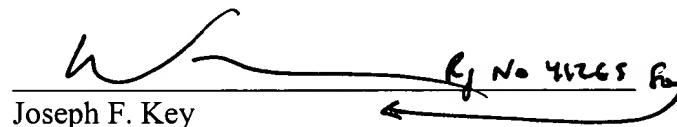
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